

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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RARE DRAWINGS BY EARLY GERMAN MASTERS
TO GO ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 10, 1984 Early German Drawings from a Private Collection offers an exceptional opportunity to explore rare fifteenth and early sixteenth century German draftsmanship. The drawings will go on view from May 27 through July 8, 1984 in the National Gallery of Art's West Building drawings galleries.

In general, American collectors and curators have focussed on drawings from the Italian and French, and to some extent, the Netherlandish schools. With a few notable exceptions (primarily the drawings of Albrecht Dürer) most collections, including those of major museums, do not contain rich or even full representations of early German drawings. This exhibition, however, presents a comprehensive look at the period.

The exhibition opens with one of the most beautiful surviving drawings from the early fifteenth century, Christ carrying the Cross (c. 1410/20), by an anonymous Viennese master, done in delicate touches of ink on vellum prepared with a green ground. An exquisite sketch of An Angel by Martin Schongauer shows the artist at his liveliest. There are five drawings by Hans Baldung Grien including one of the earliest dated drawings by the master, The Virgin on the Crescent Moon (1503). Among his many aspects, Baldung prepared designs for glass-painters and The Rape of Europa, formerly attributed to Dürer, as well as St. John the Evangelist and John the Baptist, executed in his mature years,

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demonstrate his handling of this medium. Also on view is Hans Burgkmair's extraordinary Head of Christ crowned with Thorns, which dramatically captures the pain and sorrow on the face of the tormented Christ. Two exceedingly rare drawings by Hans Weiditz include The Wheel of Fortune (c. 1520), one of the prominent and touching secular themes which reflects the social upheaval of the times. An intricate work in pen and black ink with yellow, red, blue, green and gray washes, it portrays four figures who are clinging to a wheel attempting to survive the furor of the winds represented by four puffing faces. An equally provocative work by Hans Weiditz is the freely executed The Blind Leading the Blind (c. 1520). A double-sided drawing by Lucas Cranach the Elder was created as a study for a wing of an altarpiece. St. Thomas with the Spear (recto) and St. Jacob as a Pilgrim (verso) are among the very few such preliminary drawings which survive.

While the primary focus of the exhibition is on the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, there are also fine examples from the later mannerist, baroque, and rococo periods, including a special section of landscapes. Allegory of Life and Death, a miniature by Georg Hoefnagel, portrays an infant holding a skull surrounded by an intricate border of animals, birds and insects, drawn in minute detail. Venus and Cupid (1611) by Johann Rottenhammer was probably a sketch for a wall-painting and demonstrates certain baroque features as the soft, full modeling of the body of Venus. Another later work by Johan Liss, A Peasant Couple Fighting, represents a satirical theme popular from the early sixteenth century and one which was often depicted by Liss. The spirited and fluid draftsmanship of the eighteenth century is seen in studies for altarpieces and ceilings by Cosmas Damian Asam and Melchior Steidl.

In addition to the sixty-eight drawings from the private collection, the exhibition includes six related drawings and prints lent by the British Museum.

Further, to expand the portrayal of early German draftsmanship for the Washington showing, a number of related drawings has been added from the National Gallery's collection. Beginning with the donation of Joseph E. Widener's Dürer, A Young Woman in Netherlandish Dress in 1942, and the extraordinary series of gifts from Lessing Rosenwald throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the National Gallery has made a special effort to acquire and portray early German drawings. In recent years, the Gallery has also presented several exhibitions of early German drawings including the exhibition of Dürer drawings and prints to commemorate the artist's 500th birthday in 1971, Early German Drawings and Prints in 1979, Hans Baldung Grien Prints and Drawings in 1981, and Drawings from the Holy Roman Empire in 1983.

The exhibition is on view at the British Museum, London, February 9 through April 29, 1984; and after its sole American showing at the National Gallery, will be seen at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, August 2 through September 23, 1984. The catalogue which accompanies the exhibition was written by John Rowlands, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. Andrew Robison, Senior Curator and Curator of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Art, has made the selection of Gallery drawings and is organizing the exhibition in Washington.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, (Public Information), or Carolyn Amiot, Deputy Information Officer, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565 (202) 842-6353).